

Message Text

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TO USDEL SECRETARY IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T STATE 152232 TOSEC 070057

EXDIS, FOR TARNOFF ONLY FROM WISNER

FOLLOWING REPEAT HAVANA 1300 ACTION SECSTATE MAY 19

QUOTE S E C R E T HAVANA 1300

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: PINS, MOPS, CU, AO, CG, CU, ET, YS

SUBJECT: FIDEL CASTRO DENIES CUBAN INVOLVEMENT IN SHABA

1. BEGIN SUMMARY. FIDEL CASTRO SAYS THAT CUBA, ANGOLA, AND SOVIET UNION ARE NOT INVOLVED IN CURRENT SHABA INCURSION IN ANY WAY. HE REQUESTS USG TO USE ITS INFLUENCE TO RESTRAIN OTHER COUNTRIES FROM SENDING TROOPS TO ZAIRE WHICH WOULD ENLARGE THE CONFLICT. CASTRO DOUBTS THAT ETHIOPIANS HAVE AS YET LAUNCHED LARGE OFFENSIVE IN ERITRE
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AND SAYS CUBAN TROOPS IN ANY CASE ARE NOT INVOLVED. NO CHANGE IN CUBAN PRESENCE IN SOUTH YEMEN. END SUMMARY.

2. I WAS CALLED TO PRESIDENT CASTRO'S OFFICE ABOUT 8:00 P.M., MAY 17,

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ACCOMPANIED BY FIRST VICE MINISTER OF FOREIGN RELATIONS ANILLO. CASTRO SAID THAT HE KNEW OF USG'S CONCERN ABOUT SITUATION IN SHABA AND WANTED TO SEND MESSAGE ON THIS SUBJECT URGENTLY AND IN STRICT CONFIDENCE TO SECRETARY VANCE AND PRESIDENT CARTER. HE THEN TICKED OFF FOLLOWING POINTS CAREFULLY AND DELIVERATELY:

- A. THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE CUBAN WITH THE KATANGAN FORCES IN SHABA;
- B. CUBA HAS HAD NO RPT NO PARTICIPATION EITHER DIRECTLY OR

INDIRECTLY IN THE SHABA AFFAIR;

C. CUBA HAS PROVIDED NO RPT NO WEAPONS OR OTHER MATERIEL TO THE KATANGAN FORCES;

D. CUBA HAS NOT RPT NOT TRAINED THE KATANGAN FORCES;

E. CUBA HAS NOT IN FACT HAD ANY CONTACT EITHER MILITARY OR CIVIL WITH THE KATANGANS SINCE END OF WAR IN ANGOLA AT LEAST TWO YEARS AGO. (CASTRO LATER CLARIFIED THIS BY SAYING THAT KATANGANS HAVE REPEATEDLY TRIED TO ESTABLISH CONTACTS WITH CUBANS BUT LATTER HAVE DELIVERATELY REJECTED THESE ADVANCES PRECISELY BECAUSE THEY DID NOT WISH IN ANY WAY TO STIMULATE RENEWED ACTIVITY AGAINST ZAIRE.)

3. CASTRO EXPAINED THAT CUBA HAS ADOPTED THIS POSTION BECAUSE IT DOES NOT CONSIDER KATANGAN INCURSIONS INTO ZAIRE DESIRABLE FROM ANY STANDPOINT AND SPECIFICALLY NOT CONDUCIVE TO GOOD RELATIONS AMONG NATIONS OF BLACK AFRICA OR TO PEACEFUL DEVELOPMENT OF ANGOLA, BOTH OF WHICH ARE OBJECTIVES WHICH CUBA SUPPORTS. AT THIS POINT CASTRO EMPHASIZED THE IMPORTANCE OF PEACE FOR ANGOLA, AND IN PARTICULAR THE DESIRABILITY OF BETTER RELATIONS AND ECONOMIC COOPERATION AMONG ANGOLA,

ZAIRE AND ZAMBIA. HE EMPHASIZED THAT CUBA TOOK THIS POSITION DESPITE THE CONSISTENTLY HOSTILE ATTITUDE OF ZAIRE TOWARD ANGOLA.

4. CASTRO THEN SAID THAT HE KNEW THAT ALL THE POSITIONS HE HAD OUTLINED FOR ME WERE SHARED AS WELL BY ANGOLA AND THE SOVIET UNION. HE QUALIFIED THIS ASSERTION ONLY TO THE EXTENT THAT WHEN HE SPOKE OF ANGOLA HE SPOKE OF NETO, RECOGNIZING THAT SOME OF THE LATTER'S
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SUBORDINATES MIGHT NOT AGREE WITH THIS POLICY AND MIGHT IN SOME WAY HAVE ASSISTED OR ENCOURAGED THE KATANGANS WHILE NETO WAS RECENTLY ILL AND OUT OF THE COUNTRY. CASTRO ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT ANGOLA IS SUCH A BIG COUNTRY THAT NETO HAS NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONTROL ALL ITS FRONTIERS AND SPECIFICALLY NOT THE KATANGANS. MOREOVER, BOTH BECAUSE OF LACK OF ADEQUATE FORCES AND THE POLITICAL SENSITIVITY OF DEALING WITH THE KATANGANS NETO HAS NOT MOVED TO DISARM THEM. CASTRO THEN SAID THAT HE BELIEVED THAT IF AND WHEN THE KATANGANS RETURN TO ANGOLA NETO WILL MAKE A BETTER EFFORT TO CONTROL THEM IN THE FUTURE TO AVOID REPETITIONS OF THE CURRENT INCURSIONS. CUBA, HOWEVER, COULD NOT INTERVENE IN THIS EFFORT.

5. DUE TO CUBA'S LACK OF DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE KATANGANS, CASTRO SAID THAT HE HAS NO IDEA WHAT THEIR OBJECTIVES OR MOTIVATIONS FOR THE CURRENT INVASION OF ZAIRE MAY BE; THAT IS, WHETHER THEY ARE SECESSION

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ISTS, WANT TO BRING DOWN MOBUTO'S GOVERNMENT, OR HAVE SOME OTHER AIMS. HE STRESSED SEVERAL TIMES, HOWEVER, THAT IT IS KNOWN THAT THE KATANGANS HAVE WIDE CONTACTS IN EUROPE, SUGGESTING THAT WHILE THEY APPEAR TO HAVE ACTED ON THEIR OWN THEY MAY HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED AND/OR ASSISTED FROM THAT QUARTER. CASTRO THEN SAID THAT IT WAS PRECISELY BECAUSE OF THE OUTSIDE MILITARY ASSISTANCE TO MOBUTO,

ESPECIALLY FROM MOROCCO, DURING THE PREVIOUS SHABA INCURSION THAT CUBA HAD REINFORCED ITS OWN FORCES IN ANGOLA AT THAT TIME TO ASSURE THE LATTER'S DEFENSE.

6. AT THIS POINT CASTRO URGED THAT THE USG USE ITS INFLUENCE WITH OTHER CONCERNED COUNTRIES TO PREVENT THE SENDING OF OUTSIDE TROOPS TO AID ZAIRE THIS TIME. IN THE INTERESTS OF NOT WIDENING THE CONFLICT HE SAID THAT THIS INCURSION SHOULD BE LEFT TO ZAIRE AND THE KATANGANS TO RESOLVE THEMSELVES. (WHEN I ASKED SPECIFICALLY WHETHER HE WAS REFERRING ONLY TO FOREIGN TROOPS OR TO MATERIAL ASSISTANCE AS WELL, CASTRO SAID ONLY THAT ALL PARTIES SHOULD EXERCISE THE GREATEST MODERATION.) HE SAID THAT IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT MOBUTO WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL THE SITUATION BY HIMSELF. HE REPEATED THAT CUBA, ANGOLA AND THE USSR WILL NOT INVOLVE THEMSELVES IN ANY WAY IN SUPPORT
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OF THE KATANGAN INVADERS.

7. SUMMING UP THIS TOPIC, CASTRO SAID THAT HE WANTED THE USG TO UNDERSTAND CLEARLY THAT CUBA IS NOT IN ANY WAY INVOLVED IN THE INCURSIONS INTO ZAIRE. (HE SEEMED ESPECIALLY CONCERNED THAT U.S. OBSERVERS WOULD SOMEHOW INTERPRET THIS ACTION AS AN INDIRECT CUBAN-INSPIRED RETALIATION FOR THE RECENT SOUTH AFRICAN INCURSION INTO ANGOLA.) CUBA IS OPPOSED TO THE KATANGAN ACTIONS AND HAS NOT PLANNED OR CONSPIRED TO ENCOURAGE OR SUPPORT THEM. THEY ARE NOT DESIRABLE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF ANGOLA'S OWN DEVELOPMENT OR PEACE IN THE REGION.

HE WENT ON TO ASSURE THE U.S. THAT WHAT HE HAD SAID TO ME WAS ABSOLUTELY ACCURATE. MOREOVER, CUBA HAD NOT JUST LOOKED THE OTHER WAY WHEN IT BEGAN TO HEAR REPORTS THAT THE KATANGANS WERE PREPARING FOR ANOTHER INCURSION. HE HAD WARNED NETO OVER A MONTH AGO AND URGED HIM TO TAKE STEPS TO PREVENT ANY NEW INCURSIONS. BUT AGAIN, BECAUSE OF THE DIFFICULTY OF DOING SO AND PERHAPS BECAUSE OF HIS OWN ILLNESS AND ABSENCES FROM ANGOLA NETO HAD BEEN UNABLE TO ACT.

8. REPEATING THAT HE HOPED THE U.S. WOULD ACT TO HELP AVOID A WIDENING

OF THE CONFLICT IN ZAIRE, CASTRO MOVED TO CLOSE THE CONVERSATION. I THEN ASKED IF THERE WAS ANYTHING NEW HE COULD TELL ME ABOUT THE SITUATION IN ETHIOPIA AND SPECIFICALLY IN ERITREA. CASTRO REPLIED THAT WHILE HE DID NOT HAVE COMPLETE AND UP-TO-DATE INFORMATION, IT WAS HIS IMPRESSION THAT REPORTS OF A MAJOR NEW ETHIOPIAN OFFENSIVE IN ERTIREA WERE INCORRECT SINCE MENGISTU HAS NOT HAD TIME TO PREPARE FOR SUCH A LARGE OPEATION. MOREOVER, MENGISTU HAS RECENTLY BEEN VISITING IN THE OGADEN RATHER THAN ATTENDING TO OPERATONS IN ERITREA. WHEN I ASKED WHETHER IN ANY CASE CUBAN TROOPS MIGHT BE ENGAGED THERE, CASTRO REPLIED IN THE NEGATIVE BUT IMMEDIATELY WENT ON TO SAY THAT
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HE DID NOT WANT TO GO INTO THIS SUBJECT WITH ME IN DETAIL SINCE CUBA'S POSITION WAS ALREADY WELL KNOWN (PRESUMABLY A REFERENCE TO THE DESIRABILITY OF A POLITICAL SOLUTION IN ERITREA AND THE QUESTION OF CUBAN TROOPS WITHDRAWALS FROM ETHIOPIA) BUT HE DID NOT WANT ANYTHING HE MIGHT SAY TO BE TAKEN AS A PROMISE FOR THE FUTURE. HE DID SAY THAT HE THOUGHT THAT MENGISTU'S RECENT STATEMENT ABOUT MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM CUBA AND OTHER FRIENDLY COUNTRIES ACTUALLY REFERRED TO THE OGADEN BUT HAD BEEN MISREPRESENTED OR TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT BY THE NEWS MEDIA WHICH ASSOCIATED THEM WITH ERITERA.

9. FINALLY CASTRO VOLUNTEERED THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NO INCREASES IN THE CUBAN PRESENCE IN SOUTH YEMEN--EITHER MILITARY OR CIVILIAN--FOR "YEARS." HE SAID THAT HE ASSUMED THAT RECENT COMMENTS ON THIS SUBJECT IN THE U.S. WERE PROMPTED BY THE SENATE DEBATE OVER THE MIDDLE EAST ARMS PACKAGE. I SAID THAT THERE WERE OFTEN CONFLICTING REPORTS AND AN ABSENCE OF COMPLETE INFORMATION ON ALL THESE MATTERS, AND THAT IT WAS THEREFORE EXTREMELY USEFUL TO HAVE THIS SORT OF DIRECT DIALOGUE. I ASSURED CASTRO THAT I WOULD INFORM MY GOVERNMENT PROMPTLY OF OUR CONVERSATION.

10. COMMENT. SINCE THIS IS THE FIRST SUBSTANTIVE CONVERSATION I HAVE HAD WITH CASTRO SINCE THE OPENING OF USINT, IT IS OBVIOUS THAT HE ATTACHED GREAT IMPORTANCE TO GETTING THE ABOVE MESSAGE ABOUT THE SHABA CRISIS PROMPTLY AND ACCURATELY TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THE USG. WHETHER HIS OBJECTIVE IS TO CLARIFY ANY REAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS WHICH MIGHT FURTHER IMPAIR U.S.-CUBAN RELATIONS, OR JUST TO PROVIDE A DEEPER COVER AND PROTECTION FOR HIS OWN OBJECTIVES IN ANGOLA AND ZAIRE REMAINS TO BE SEEN. USINT WOULD BE VERY INTERESTED TO RECEIVE THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS ON THE VERACITY OF CASTRO'S STATEMENTS INSOFAR AS THEY CAN BE JUDGED. WE LEAVE TO WASHINGTON'S JUDGMENT THE FURTHER DISTRIBUTION OF THIS MESSAGE. LANE.
UNQUOTE CHRISTOPHER

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